

Request for Comments: Vermont Office of Economic Stimulus and Recovery
2009-03-06

The State of Vermont Office of Economic Stimulus and Recovery Seeks Input on a Coordinated Strategy for Supporting Broadband Service and Related Purposes in Vermont under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA)

Background:

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), enacted by Congress and signed by the President on February 17, 2009, contains a number of initiatives related to advancing the availability and use of broadband infrastructure. Most specifically, the ARRA provides funding to the National Telecommunications and Information Agency (NTIA), part of the U.S. Department of Commerce, for grants through the Broadband Telecommunications Opportunity Program (BTOP) and to the Rural Utilities Service (RUS), part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, for grants, loans, and loan guarantees for broadband infrastructure. Funding awards will be made by these agencies, and not by the State of Vermont. Other elements of the ARRA may also provide direct or indirect support for broadband infrastructure.

Although the state will not make funding decisions under either of these programs, the authorizing language for the BTOP provides that NTIA may consult with states regarding areas that are “unserved” and “underserved” for broadband within the state, and regarding the allocation of grant funds within the state for projects affecting the state. In addition, no area of a project funded with amounts made available under the ARRA funding through RUS may receive funding to provide broadband service under the BTOP. Furthermore, the State of Vermont anticipates that it will receive requests to support proposals for funding broadband-related projects in Vermont from the RUS and NTIA programs. On March 2, 2009, Governor James Douglas announced the creation of the Office of Economic Stimulus and Recovery (ESR) to coordinate the State’s use of federal funds authorized by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. The ESR is issuing this Request for Comments in order to allow the State of Vermont to consider and respond to requests for support and assistance in a better informed and more organized manner.

Excerpts from the ARRA describing the broadband programs funded through NTIA and RUS are attached to this Request for Comments. The full text of the ARRA is available through the ESR website at recovery.vermont.gov.

Objectives:

The ESR desires to see the most competitive applications from Vermont that will maximize the assistance available for the advancement of broadband availability and use in the state under the ARRA. The ESR believes it is likely that Vermont will see the greatest benefit from the ARRA’s broadband programs under a coordinated approach to applications to these programs, and seeks voluntary cooperation from interested parties to this end.

Programmatic Areas:

A number of types of activities related to broadband infrastructure development and the use of broadband may be funded through the ARRA. ESR seeks information related to a variety of potential proposals which may be part of a comprehensive strategy, including:

- Broadband service to end users. ESR is especially interested in proposals which address areas of the state which currently lack broadband service, and to which the state is not aware of any firm and legally binding commitment to provide broadband prior to the end of 2010. Please see the attached map for guidance.
- Construction of infrastructure for backhaul and institutional networks
- Use of broadband and stimulation of demand for broadband
- Public computer centers
- Broadband mapping and data collection
- Any other activities that may be funded through either the NTIA or RUS programs

Information Requested:

Entities which anticipate seeking state support for proposals to the NTIA or RUS broadband programs are encouraged to submit to ESR a narrative describing your proposed project, to the best of your ability given the abbreviated time to respond. Entities who are willing to provide any form support for an proposal involving one of these programs are also encouraged to respond.. To the extent applicable to the proposed project, the following specific information is requested regarding each potential proposal:

1. A general description of the activities or facilities proposed for support
2. The entity involved in the proposed project, and any partnering entities or projects
3. The timeframe in which the project can be started and completed, and a general description of the entity's ability to execute on its plan
4. The geographic area to be served by the proposed project
5. A description of the anticipated present and future speed of any broadband service to be provided
6. The estimated amount of federal funding to be sought, and from which programs
7. Funding or resources, which you have sought or may wish seek from the State of Vermont to strengthen, support, or enhance the proposal, such as access to state buildings or rights-of-way, or funding from the broadband grant program administered by the Vermont Telecommunications Authority. Please note that ESR does not provide any specific state funding or facility related to broadband and may not have authority to provide any specific assistance requested. State assistance may be subject to appropriations or other requirements.
8. A description of the funding proposed from other sources, including whether it is already committed
9. How it is anticipated that the project will be concluded or financially sustained
10. How the project conforms to the applicable federal program requirements and preferences

Responses containing a level of detail which may be required to support an application submitted to a funding agency are not required; concise summaries containing enough information to adequately characterize the contemplated project are requested.

Responses

Responses may be sent by email to chris.campbell@state.vt.us or mailed to:

Vermont Economic Stimulus and Recovery Office
109 State St, 5th Floor
Montpelier, VT 05609-0201

To facilitate review of responses, please submit an electronic copy on CD with mailed copies.

Due to the anticipated short timeframe for implementation of federal stimulus efforts, responses are requested by March 20, 2009. ESR may have very limited ability to review responses submitted after this date.

Respondents are encouraged to provide information which may be shared with other parties in order to facilitate coordination. However, respondents who believe that information submitted as part of a response to this request is proprietary and not subject to a public records request pursuant to the provisions of 1 V.S.A. § 317 should clearly identify that information if they are requesting confidential treatment. Information for which respondents are requesting confidential treatment should be clearly marked as such and pages containing information should be segregated into a separate document or documents. Each page containing information for which the respondent is requesting confidential treatment should be marked "confidential."

Questions regarding this notice should be addressed via email by March 11, 2009 to:
chris.campbell@state.vt.us

Responses to such questions about this notice will be posted to the ESR website (recovery.vermont.gov) by March 13, 2009.

This Request for Comments will also be posted on the ESR website for those not receiving a direct distribution.

Post-submission requests and actions

Based on responses to this Request for Comments, the ESR will consider what additional action, if any, may be warranted by the state to encourage successful leverage of federal broadband stimulus programs to benefit Vermonters, and make recommendations as needed to other state agencies, instrumentalities of the state, and elected or appointed leaders. Respondents to this Request for Comments may be asked to provide information orally or in writing for ESR or other state agencies to supplement responses provided in the Request for Comments. Respondents may receive recommendations on steps which could improve proposed projects' coordination with other proposals and their likelihood of success. Cooperation will be strongly encouraged, but is voluntary for all respondents.